THE QUESTION

What did the early Christians believe about speaking in tongues?

Asked by a THF member on May 22, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 14 early Christian passages and 167 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-christians-believe-about-speaking-in-tongues

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

The early Christians saw speaking in tongues as a real gift of the Holy Spirit, first poured out at Pentecost and given to some, not all, as the Spirit chose. They described it as speaking real languages through the Spirit, said it still happened in the church, and taught that such signs mainly served to convince unbelievers.

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IN THIS STUDY

1	Tongues are one gift among many	**2**	**6**	Such signs were meant for unbelievers	**4**
2	The Spirit gives them as He chooses	**2**	**7**	Tongues are partial until the perfect comes	**5**
3	The gift began at Pentecost	**3**		What these passages don't tell us	**5**
4	Irenaeus heard believers speak many languages	**3**		The Sources: 14 early Christian passages and 167 Bible verses, with links	**6**
5	Gentile believers praised God in tongues	**4**			

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POINT 1 OF 7

Tongues are one gift among many

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement quotes Paul's list of the Spirit's gifts, which includes kinds of tongues and their interpretation, all given by one Spirit as He wills. Clement then explains that believers share the common virtues but are each especially fitted for the work God gives them.

1

"For to one is given the word of wisdom by the Spirit; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith through the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing through the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another different kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. And all these are worked by the one and the same Spirit, distributing to each one as He wills.""

later in the same passage

"This does not mean that they do not share in the common virtues, but that they are especially skilled in the things to which they are appointed."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.21 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

The Spirit gives them as He chooses

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Gregory Thaumaturgus quotes the same passage to show that the Holy Spirit Himself works these gifts. He hands them out to each person differently, which is why the gifts belong to one body with many members.

2

"But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Gregory Thaumaturgus,** *A Sectional Confession of Faith* 1 (c. 240–270 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

The gift began at Pentecost

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus ties the first tongues to the day the Spirit came down on the disciples, when onlookers thought they were drunk. He sees it as God keeping His promise through the prophet. Hippolytus also speaks of the Spirit coming to the apostles as fiery tongues.

3 “Then, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples so that they could all prophesy and speak in tongues, some mocked them as if they were drunk with new wine.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 3, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

4 “This is the Spirit who was given to the apostles in the form of fiery tongues.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (c. 200–236 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 7, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 4 OF 7

Irenaeus heard believers speak many languages

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus, in the second century, says this still happened in his own day. He describes members of the church with prophetic gifts speaking all kinds of languages through the Spirit, for the good of all and to declare God's mysteries.

5 “Similarly, we also hear many members in the Church who have prophetic gifts, speaking all kinds of languages through the Spirit and revealing hidden truths for the common good and declaring God's mysteries.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book V* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 5 OF 7

Gentile believers praised God in tongues

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian recalls the house of Cornelius, where the Spirit came on Gentiles who believed and they blessed God in different tongues. Another third-century writer uses the same event to show that the Spirit can be given to believers before water baptism.

6 “For when, in the house of Cornelius the centurion, the Holy Ghost had descended on the Gentiles who were there, burning with the heat of faith and believing in the Lord with their whole heart, and when, filled with the Spirit, they blessed God in different tongues, even then the blessed Apostle Peter, mindful of the divine command and the Gospel, commanded that those same people should be baptized, though they had already been filled with the Holy Spirit.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 10, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “Further, as you are not ignorant, the Holy Spirit is found to have been given by the Lord without baptism of water to men who believe, as it is written in Acts of the Apostles in this way: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 14, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Such signs were meant for unbelievers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions say the gifts listed in Mark 16, including new tongues, came first to the apostles for preaching and then to those they taught. These signs were not for the benefit of the one using them but to win people the preaching had not yet persuaded.

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8

“They were not for the benefit of those who performed them, but to convince unbelievers, so that those whom the word did not persuade might be put to shame by the power of signs.”

later in the same passage

“For signs are not for us who believe, but for unbelievers, both Jews and Gentiles.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Source 11, page 7** Read it in the library ›

Apostolic Constitutions (c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Tongues are partial until the perfect comes

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Archelaus quotes Paul that tongues will cease when what is perfect arrives. He applies this against a false teacher who claimed to be that perfect one, insisting that the perfect one we wait for is Christ.

9

“For in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul speaks in these words about the perfection that is to come: "Whether there are prophecies, they shall fail; whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there is knowledge, it shall be destroyed. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when what is perfect has come, then what is in part shall be done away."”

later in the same passage

“Therefore, it is certain that what he has declared to us is this: we are to look for our Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect one.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Archelaus,** *Disputation with Manes* 1 (c. 270–300 AD) **Source 13, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not describe tongues as a private prayer language.
- They do not settle whether every believer should expect to speak in tongues or treat tongues as required proof of the Spirit.
- They say little about how tongues were used or interpreted in ordinary church meetings.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 14 early Christian passages and 167 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–14, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 15–85, in Bible order), then 96 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *14 passages from 11 writers*

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 1*

1 *Diatessaron* 55 (1885 English; on point 6) "they 10 shall speak with new tongues; Mark 16:18 and they shall take up serpents, and if they drink deadly poison, it shall not injure them… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** "this reason does the apostle declare, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," terming those persons "perfect" who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "when the Holy Ghost had descended upon the disciples, that they all might prophesy and speak with tongues, and some mocked them, as if drunken with new wine, Peter said… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Stromata* 4.21 **Quote 1, page 2** "working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another different kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. And all these are worked by the… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Stromata* 1.16 (1885 English) "Let him that speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 6*

6 *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 1) "will be the spirit of might. "To another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 7*

7 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "is the Spirit that was given to the apostles in the form of fiery tongues… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 8*

8 *A Sectional Confession of Faith* 1 **Quote 2, page 2** "another discerning of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues… [continues online] **read ›**

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Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 9*

9 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 29 (on point 2) earnestly desire to attain to the law of the Gospel. Certainly, in the Spirit there are different kinds of offices, because in the times there is a different order of… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 10*

10 *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “we find also, in the Acts of the Apostles, that this is maintained by the apostles, and kept in the truth of the saving faith, so that when, in the… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 8, page 5** “good reason He also said to all of us together, when we had been made complete concerning those gifts given by Him through the Spirit, “Now these signs will follow… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) s Day, keep a great festival. For on that day, at the third hour, the Lord Jesus sent on us the gift of the Holy Ghost, and we were filled… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 13*

13 *Disputation with Manes* 1 **Quote 9, page 5** “the perfection that is to come: "Whether there are prophecies, they shall fail; whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there is knowledge, it shall be destroyed. For we… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *source 14*

14 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** “those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles. For… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *71 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

15 **Genesis 10:5** From these the islands of the nations were divided in their land, each according to his language, in their tribes and in their nations. **read ›**

16 **Genesis 10:20** These are the sons of Ham, in their tribes, according to their languages, in their countries, and in their nations. **read ›**

17 **Genesis 11:1** The whole earth had one speech, and all had one voice. **read ›**

18 **Genesis 11:7** Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that no one may understand the voice of his neighbor.” **read ›**

19 **Exodus 23:8** And you shall not accept gifts; for gifts blind the eyes of those who see and corrupt righteous words. **read ›**

20 **Leviticus 21:22** He may eat the gifts of God, the most holy things, and of the holy things; **read ›**

21 **1 Samuel 1:13** She was speaking in her heart; her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. And Eli took her for a drunken woman. **read ›**

22 **1 Samuel 10:6** Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. **read ›**

23 **2 Samuel 23:2** The Spirit of the Lord spoke in me, and his word was on my tongue. **read ›**

24 **Isaiah 5:15** And man shall be brought low, and a man shall be dishonored, and the lofty eyes shall be brought low. **read ›**

25 **Isaiah 28:11** because of the contempt of the lips, by means of another tongue; for they will speak to this people, saying to them, **read ›**

26 **Jeremiah 28:7** Nevertheless hear the word of the Lord that I speak in your ears and in the ears of all the people. (Septuagint Jeremiah 35:7 (Jeremiah 28:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

27 **Jeremiah 33:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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28 **Jeremiah 38:4** They said to the king, “Let that man be put to death, for he weakens the hands of the men of war who are left in the city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking to them according to these words; for this man does not speak oracles of peace to this people, but only evil.” (Septuagint Jeremiah 45:4 (Jeremiah 38:4 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

29 **Ezekiel 29:10** Therefore behold, I am against you and against all your rivers, and I will give the land of Egypt over to wilderness and sword and destruction, from Migdol and Syene even to the borders of the Ethiopians. **read ›**

30 **Ezekiel 33:2** Son of man, speak to the children of your people and say to them: When I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and set him as their watchman, **read ›**

31 **Daniel 11:13** And the king of the north shall return and bring a multitude greater than the first; and at the end of the times of years an invasion shall come with a great army and with many possessions. **read ›**

32 **Hosea 12:10** And I will speak to the prophets; and I have multiplied visions, and by the hands of the prophets I have been represented. (Septuagint Hosea 12:11 (Hosea 12:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

33 **Amos 7:15** and the Lord took me from the sheep, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ **read ›**

34 **1 Esdras 3:21** and it makes all hearts rich, and one remembers neither king nor satrap; and it makes everyone talk in talents. **read ›**

35 **Wisdom of Solomon 7:15** May God grant me to speak with judgment, and to think worthily of what has been given; for he himself is the guide even of wisdom, and the corrector of the wise. **read ›**

36 **Wisdom of Solomon 10:21** For wisdom opened the mouth of the mute, and made the tongues of infants speak clearly. **read ›**

37 **Wisdom of Sirach 4:24** For wisdom will be known by speech, and instruction by the word of the tongue. **read ›**

38 **Wisdom of Sirach 7:14** Do not babble in a multitude of elders, and do not repeat a word in your prayer. **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Sirach 17:6** Counsel, and a tongue, and eyes, ears, and a heart he gave them for understanding. **read ›**

40 **Wisdom of Sirach 18:17** Behold, is not a word better than a good gift? And both are found with a gracious man. **read ›**

41 **Wisdom of Sirach 19:16** There is one who slips, but not from the soul; and who has not sinned with his tongue? **read ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 20:10** There is a gift that will not profit you, and there is a gift whose return is double. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 20:29** Presents and gifts blind the eyes of the wise, and like a muzzle in the mouth they turn away correction. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:14** A third tongue has shaken many, and driven them from nation to nation; it has pulled down strong cities, and overthrown the houses of nobles. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:24** He who acquires a wife begins a possession, a helper suited to him and a pillar of rest. (Septuagint Wisdom of Sirach 36:29 (Wisdom of Sirach 36:24 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:18** four kinds of things spring up, good and evil, life and death, and it is the tongue that continually rules over them. **read ›**

48 **Wisdom of Sirach 40:21** The flute and the psaltery make melody sweet, but above both is a pleasant tongue. **read ›**

49 **Wisdom of Sirach 41:23** of repeating a report you have heard, and of revealing secret words; **read ›**

50 **Wisdom of Sirach 51:5** from the depth of the belly of Hades, from an unclean tongue and a lying word— **read ›**

51 **Wisdom of Sirach 51:22** The Lord gave me a tongue as my reward, and with it I will praise him. **read ›**

52 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:8** For their tongue is polished by a craftsman, and they themselves are overlaid with gold and with silver; but they are false and cannot speak. **read ›**

53 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:41** When they see a mute who cannot speak, they bring Bel to him and ask Bel to speak, as though Bel were able to perceive. **read ›**

54 **2 Maccabees 12:37** Beginning the battle cry with hymns in the language of his fathers, he raised a shout, and rushing unexpectedly upon those with Gorgias, he put them to flight. **read ›**

55 **2 Maccabees 15:29** Then there was shouting and uproar, and they blessed the Sovereign in the language of their fathers. **read ›**

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56 **2 Maccabees 15:33** And cutting out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor, he said that he would give it piece by piece to the birds, and that the wages of his foolishness were to be hung up opposite the temple. **read ›**

57 **4 Maccabees 5:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **1 Enoch 14:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **1 Enoch 14:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **1 Enoch 37:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

61 **1 Enoch 84:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

62 **Acts 2:4** They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. **read ›**

63 **Acts 8:19** saying, “Give me this authority too, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” **read ›**

64 **Acts 8:20** But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! **read ›**

65 **Acts 10:46** For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter answered, **read ›**

66 **Acts 19:6** When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. **read ›**

67 **Acts 28:11** After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. **read ›**

68 **1 Corinthians 12:8** For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, **read ›**

69 **1 Corinthians 12:10** to another workings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discernment of spirits, to another kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. **read ›**

70 **1 Corinthians 14:2** For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, for no one understands; but in the spirit he speaks mysteries. **read ›**

71 **1 Corinthians 14:4** He who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but he who prophesies builds up the church. **read ›**

72 **1 Corinthians 14:5** Now I desire that you all speak in tongues, but even more that you prophesy. For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be built up. **read ›**

73 **1 Corinthians 14:6** But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching? **read ›**

74 **1 Corinthians 14:9** So also you, unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. **read ›**

75 **1 Corinthians 14:10** There are, perhaps, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without meaning. **read ›**

76 **1 Corinthians 14:13** Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. **read ›**

77 **1 Corinthians 14:18** I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than all of you; **read ›**

78 **1 Corinthians 14:19** but in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, so that I may instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. **read ›**

79 **1 Corinthians 14:21** In the law it is written: “By other tongues and by other lips I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. **read ›**

80 **1 Corinthians 14:22** Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelieving; but prophecy is not for the unbelieving, but for those who believe. **read ›**

81 **1 Corinthians 14:23** If therefore the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and unlearned or unbelieving people come in, will they not say that you are mad? **read ›**

82 **1 Corinthians 14:27** If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two, or at most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. **read ›**

83 **Galatians 1:8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach to you a gospel other than what we preached to you, let him be cursed. **read ›**

84 **Ephesians 2:2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. **read ›**

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85 **Ephesians 3:6** that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel, **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *96 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 25:11

Malachi 1:11

Matthew 3:15 · 5:21 · 5:22 · 6:24 · 9:29 · 10:20 · 11:5 · 11:27 · 16:6 · 18:10 · 19:30 · 20:16 · 21:32 · 22:13 · 22:21 · 27:46

Mark 13:32 · 16:17

Luke 1:46 · 3:11 · 6:46 · 10:20 · 10:22 · 10:27 · 15:22 · 16:16 · 22:15

John 1:14 · 3:36 · 5:30 · 10:34 · 12:34 · 14:16 · 14:18 · 15:15 · 15:20 · 15:25 · 15:26 · 16:13 · 17:6 · 17:11 · 20:22

Acts 2:17 · 2:37 · 8:9 · 10:42 · 10:44 · 15:9

Romans 8:6 · 8:7 · 8:9 · 8:21 · 11:4

1 Corinthians 2:6 · 2:12 · 3:3 · 4:15 · 7:29 · 7:40 · 10:4 · 11:3 · 11:5 · 11:7 · 11:9 · 11:10 · 11:18 · 11:23 · 12:1 · 12:3 · 12:4 · 12:7 · 12:12 · 12:31 · 13:1 · 13:8 · 14:25 · 14:26 · 14:34

2 Corinthians 4:13

Galatians 2:8 · 4:4 · 4:19 · 5:17

Ephesians 4:5 · 4:6 · 4:8 · 4:16

1 Thessalonians 5:23

2 Thessalonians 1:9

1 Timothy 4:1

2 Timothy 3:8

1 Peter 2:23 · 3:20

Revelation 5:8

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did the early Christians believe about speaking in tongues?” on May 22, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY